



TEACHING TOLERANCE

A PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER

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Defenders of Justice

Overview:

In this activity, students will summarize biographies of individuals who fought racism and helped make it possible for a black man to serve as President of the United States. Along the way, they'll discover that they, too, can take a stand for justice and equality and make the world a better place today.

Framework:

In 2008, Barack Obama took the oath of office to become the 44th President of the United States and swore to "defend the Constitution of the United States," which begins "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union [and] establish *Justice* ..." When Obama took that oath, his hand was laid across the same Bible that President Abraham Lincoln used more than a century ago when he made the same promise.

Regarded by many historians as our nation's greatest president, Lincoln is perhaps best known for issuing the [Emancipation Proclamation](#) ^[1], which declared that "slaves ... shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free." Lincoln called the document "an act of *justice*."

During Lincoln's time, it was unthinkable that a black man like Barack Obama could ever serve as President of the United States. Now, as President Obama is our nation's highest "defender of justice," it is important to remember that he does so because so many men, women and children — abolitionists, civil rights advocates and their allies — stood up for justice across the centuries.

Objectives:

- Working in small groups, students will summarize biographies of Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Abraham Lincoln.
- Using a "jigsaw" format, each student will serve as the "expert" on their assigned person, while other "experts" teach them about other biographies.
- Students also will examine how they, too, can make the world a more just place.
- Students will display their findings in a *Defenders of Justice* mobile.

Materials:

- Music for "[What Can One Little Person Do?](#)" ^[2] (mp3)
- Copies of the song's [lyrics](#) ^[3] for each student
- Reading selections from the school library about Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Rosa

Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Abraham Lincoln, selected in advance

- Two copies of the cube handout ^[4] for each student
- Scissors, tape, string

Suggested Procedures:

1. Using the framework above, provide students with context for the lesson and explain that they'll be investigating "defenders of justice" who fought against racism and helped make it possible for a black man to become President of the United States. Ask students what justice ^[5] means to them. Write their responses on the board.
2. Pass out the lyrics to "What Can One Little Person Do?" and practice singing the song as a class. Ask students to share what they already know about Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr.; focus on how these individuals advanced justice.
3. Break the class into five small groups — one each for Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King and Abraham Lincoln. Provide each group with your pre-selected books and one copy of the cube handout ^[4]. Group members should review the books together and then discuss how they should fill out the handout. Once the group agrees on the specifics, each student should complete their copy of the handout.
4. Mix students up into new groups that are comprised of one representative for Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King and Abraham Lincoln. Representatives should teach each other about their assigned person.
5. As a whole class, discuss how the individuals studied were the same and different: "What was similar about the people you researched? Different? What surprised you? What characteristics did they have in common? What characteristics were different?"
6. Sing "What Can One Little Person Do?" again as a class. Explain to students that one thing Obama has asked ^[6] is that everyone in the country "do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Let us be our brother's keeper, ... Let us be our sister's keeper." Explain that children have a role to play in this too. Like Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King and Abraham Lincoln, children can help create a more just world. One person — even "little ones" — can make a difference in someone else's life.
7. Pass out another copy of the cube handout to each student, and ask students to reflect on one way they will help make the world a better place this month. In completing their personal cubes, they will need to describe the issue they want to address, specify how they will do so, identify people who can help, anticipate obstacles and state their ultimate hope — all key ingredients for taking action.
8. Once students have completed their personal cubes, combine them with the biography cubes to create "Defenders of Justice" mobiles in the classroom. Use the mobiles as a reference point to help start morning meetings or other "sharing times," letting students report back in on the progress they've made and asking for support when things don't go as planned.

Standards

This lesson supports content standards in grades 3-5 for language arts [7], U.S. History (antebellum period [8], civil rights era [9] and K-4 historical understanding [10]) and life skills [11].

This lesson is inspired by Strategic Reading and Writing: Summarizing Antislavery Biographies [12] from the International Reading Association.

Leaders and Groups Justice Grades 3 to 5 Social Studies
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Source URL: <http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/defenders-justice>

Links:

[1] http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/emancipation_proclamation/transcript.html

[2]

http://ia700108.us.archive.org/15/items/WhatCanOneLittlePersonDo/WhatCanOneLittlePersonDo_vbr.m3u

[3] <http://orchard.sbschools.net/admin/schcal/mlk/08/littleperson.htm>

[4] http://tolerance.org/images/teach/activities/tt_defenders_of_justice_cube.pdf

[5] <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/justice>

[6] <http://my.barackobama.com/page/content/hisownwords>

[7] <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/standardDetails.asp?subjectID=7&standardID=7>

[8] <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/topicsDetail.asp?topicsID=822&subjectID=5>

[9] <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/topicsDetail.asp?topicsID=832&subjectID=5>

[10] <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/standardDetails.asp?subjectID=4&standardID=4>

[11] <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/SubjectTopics.asp?SubjectID=22>

[12] http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=1017

Cube

Topic: _____

← Name and when he or she lived

How did the person struggle against injustice?

Three words to describe the injustice the person struggled against. →

Who helped this person struggle against injustice?

WHAT HE OR SHE DID

← What obstacles did the person have to overcome?

WHO HELPED?

WHAT STOOD IN THE WAY?

What did this person accomplish? →

SUPPORTED JUSTICE

To complete your cube...

1. Cut along SOLID lines.
2. Crease along DOTTED lines.
3. Tape or glue flaps at corners of cube.



